



The Strange Case of MARY PAGE

The Great McClure Mystery Story, Written by FREDERICK LEWIS in Collaboration With JOHN T. M'INTYRE, Author of the Ashton Kirk Detective Stories. Read the Story and See the Essanay Moving Pictures

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SYNOPSIS.

Mary Page, actress, is accused of the murder of James Pollock and is defended by her lover, Philip Langdon. Pollock was intoxicated. Shale, a crook and tool of Pollock, was on the fire escape watching for Langdon.

THE DRAMA OF THE LAW

WITH the entrance of the judge the turmoil of the vast crowd that filled the courtroom almost to suffocation subsided into a tense whisper of expectancy. The atmosphere was vibrant with it—tense as a violin string which snapped and brought the throng surging wildly to its feet when some one shrilled:

"Here she comes!"

At the back of the room men and women fought in a frenzy for foothold upon the seats of chairs, drowning the thunder of the judge's gavel with their clamorous hysteria, while those nearer the front were flung bodily against the steady wall of police beyond which stood Mary Page, framed by the grim shadow of the prisoner's door.

Mary was waiting, breathless, terrified, for "some one" to come. The judge looked at his watch and then at



Mary Stretched Out One Slim Hand.

the door, and another whispering wave of sound too intangible to be called words swept over the room. Almost before it died, however, Philip Langdon, the brilliant young lawyer who was defending Mary Page from the charge of murder and who in his battle for her life was also battling for his own happiness, came in.

At sight of him Mary rose to her feet with a little childlike sob of relief and stretched out one slim hand with a quivering smile that was more poignant than tears and more pitiful than an outburst of grief.

"Poor little thing!" said some one and was instantly hushed by a burly policeman whose own eyes were suspiciously damp as Langdon, with a smile as brave as Mary's own, took her hand and bent over her with a whispered word of hope and greeting.

The judge rapped for order, and Langdon put back his shoulders with the gesture of one ready for the battle. Another day in the great trial of Mary Page had begun!

It was a trial which was engrossing the whole country. The victories and defeats of the great war and the fluctuations of Wall street were unceremoniously thrust into inside pages of the daily papers that the whole front sheet might be devoted to photograph after photograph and story after story of the lovely young actress, who was either a tragic victim of the law or a murderer.

Column after column had already been printed about this young girl, who on the very edge of triumph as a star had been sucked into the maelstrom of law beneath the shadow of the gallows. The story of her youth amid poverty and suffering; of her first stage success and her wonderful ability, had been told over and over, while woven through it, like a shimmering thread of gold, was the story, half hinted, half boldly detailed, of the love of Philip Langdon for Mary, whom he was now defending in the face of overwhelming evidence and inexplicable mystery.

There were stories, too—more guarded—of James Pollock, who had been found dead with Mary's unconscious form on the floor beside him—stories that hinted of a dissolute life and of other girls whom he had led to trage-

dy; stories of his wealth, his strange ambitions and his life of glided ease, but at best in the eyes of the world he was only a lay figure—a bit of dead flesh upon which hung the vibrant living tragedy of Mary herself.

The formal routine of the opening of court was hurriedly gone through. The district attorney and Langdon held a subdued and secret colloquy with the judge, and then the first witness of the day was called.

"Mary Page!"

At the sound of her name Mary rose unsteadily to her feet, her eyes turned appealingly to Langdon, one trembling hand crushing back the little cry that rose involuntarily to her lips. But HER agitation was no more than an echo of the excitement that swept through the crowded room. Somewhere a woman caught her breath in a stifled sob, and at the back the spectators clambered upon their chairs, crowding forward in spite of angry whispers of "Sit down!" and the sharp rap of the judge's gavel augmented by the official "Order in the court!"

To Langdon alone the calling of Mary came as no surprise, and he was at her side in a moment, whispering reassurance and urging her to answer as simply and clearly as possible the questions she was asked. His calm gave her back some measure of her own serenity, and her voice was low but clear as she took the oath and, stepping up into the witness stand, looked down upon that sea of faces. For a moment they swam before her eyes, and with a catch in her throat she remembered the last time she had looked down upon crowded faces; looked down across the footlights upon thousands of smiling lips and friendly eyes above a snow-storm of applauding white gloves. How long ago it seemed, and yet how short a time! And now the faces that stared up at her were avid with curiosity, some hostile, some sympathetic, but all pallid with the voracity of the sensation seeker.

Then her eyes, traveling beyond them, met the tear dimmed ones of her mother leaning forward yearningly from the suffering on that face Mary smiled. Her first answers to the questions of the District Attorney were spoken with quiet dignity.

"Miss Page, isn't it true that James Pollock wished to marry you?"

"Yes." The answer was lower now, and a hot flush crept for a moment into Mary's pale cheeks.

"And you found his attentions unwelcome?"

"Something in the tone brought her head up sharply.

"I had told Mr. Pollock that I could not marry him," she said firmly, and with a hauteur that wrung a little whisper of admiration from the spectators.

Abruptly the prosecutor changed his train of questioning.

"Now, Miss Page," he said harshly, "please tell the court exactly what happened just previous to the time when the revolver-shot was heard and Mr. Langdon found you unconscious beside the murdered man. Begin with the moment you left the banquet."

With a shiver of aversion Mary closed her eyes for a second; then, gripping the edge of the witness-stand, she began speaking slowly and with an obvious effort.

"When the boy brought me the message—I was glad to go. They were drinking and were very noisy at the banquet—and I was tired. The boy showed me the door of the suite, and I went in."

She paused and covered her eyes as if to shut out something terrible that she saw.

"Mr. Pollock was in the room," she said at last. "He—he had been drinking—he wasn't himself—he could hardly stand. He—he said he wanted to talk to me alone for five minutes—and he wouldn't let me out, though I was afraid and begged him to."

"Did you try to get out? Was there a struggle between you and Mr. Pollock?"

She shook her head. "Not then," she said, with a little sob. "But—I was very angry—I told him he had tricked me—and I wouldn't listen to him. We—we quarreled over his being drunk, and—he tried to make me take a drink of the whiskey myself."

A shudder of repugnance swept over her, and her eyes grew wide and staring, and she swayed for a moment like a flower in a storm; then, with a tremendous effort, as one called back from the borderland to consciousness, she added hoarsely:

"I remember striking at him—and knocking the glass out of his hand. I heard it break—and then—I must have fainted!"

"Miss Page," came still another question, "if you had refused James Pollock—if you feared him—why did you grant him an interview late at night in a private room at the hotel?"

"Grant him an interview?" her voice rose in startled protest. "I didn't. That was why I was so angry—I had

expected to find Mr. Langdon in that room!"

"Oh! You had made arrangements then to meet Mr. Langdon there? Again the satiric note crept into the harsh voice, and a crimson tide rushed to Mary's pale cheeks.

"The boy told me," she said with dignity, "that Mr. Langdon was waiting to speak to me. I thought he had come to take me home."

"The boy—what boy?" The question leapt sharply now.

"Why, the bellboy who brought the message," she said in surprise, and, turning, pointed toward the group of witnesses where the small bellhop cowered, half covering his face with his shaking hands.

For the moment at least every eye was upon him, and some of the hostility vanished from those watching faces as a wave of surprised comment slipped from lip to lip. For after all, if Mary Page had indeed gone into that room expecting Langdon and not Pollock, it robbed the murder of the infamy of cool deliberation.

Mary herself was both surprised and confused by the sudden turn of events and, dismissed from the witness-box, returned to her own seat bewildered at the seeming importance attached to what had heretofore appeared so small a detail.

But it was anything but small in the eyes of the District Attorney and Langdon, and there was a gleam of triumph in the latter's eyes as the whimpering boy from the hotel took the oath. Before he went into the witness-box, however, the judge leaned forward and frowned down at him.

"Do you understand, Joe," he said harshly, "that what you have just taken is an oath? And that the law can put you into prison for perjury if you do not tell the exact truth after taking that oath?"

"Y—yes, sir," stammered the boy. "I'll tell the truth, s'help-me Gawd!" Light laughter ran through the room, but the court attendant immediately called for order.

"Tell us exactly what message you carried to Miss Page in the banquet room," said the District Attorney, when quiet reigned. "It was Miss Page you took the message to, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir, it was her. And the gent in the gray suit he says, 'Tell Miss Page Mr. Langdon wants to see her here at once.'"

"And you delivered the message just that way to Miss Page?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why didn't you testify to this at the Coroner's inquest?" It was the judge this time, stern and implacable, and the boy in the witness-box cringed and burst into tears.

"They—they—never asked me wot the message was I was takin' to her. I—I didn't think it mattered."

With an exclamation of exasperation the prosecutor sat down, turning the small witness over to Langdon, into whose tired face fresh hope had now come. His voice, as he spoke to the boy, was gentle and friendly, and the snuffling lad wiped his eyes with the back



"Do you understand, Joe, that what you have just taken is an oath?"

of his hand answered him eagerly. He seemed glad to find someone who didn't frighten him.

"Joe," said Langdon, his voice full of kindness, "that night wasn't the first time you had seen Mr. Pollock, was it?"

"No, sir," said the boy in his shrill young voice. "Everybody knew James Pollock at the Republic. He came there a lot—him and Mr. Slade."

"And he was pretty generous in his tips, wasn't he?" The question was quiet, and the District Attorney, who had made a move to interrupt, sank back without speaking as the boy answered:

"Oh, so-so! He could afford to be."

"And so, on the night when he asked you to take that message to Miss Page, he gave you a good big tip, didn't he?"

"Yes," said the boy, beginning to whimper again. "But I didn't do it for that. I didn't think there was any harm in the message. He says to me, says he, 'It's just a joke I'm playin' on her, Joe,' he says. 'I want to fool her. And he gimme five dollars—and laughed—and told me to beat it—and I did.'"

"That is all, I think," said Langdon with satisfaction, and the boy crept back to the witness-bench, striving in vain for some of the jaunty assurance that had marked him in the earlier hours of the day. He had thought he would be a little hero after his testimony and that he would enjoy the fleeting publicity; but he was ashamed of the laugh he had made.

The prosecutor himself was almost equally discomfited, for it had been his plan to build up stone by stone a towering temple of evidence to prove that Mary Page had in cold blood plotted and carried out the murder of James Pollock, and now the boy's testimony had in a minute undermined the whole structure. It forced him to play his trump card at what he feared was the



"Have you ever seen this revolver before, Miss Page?"

wrong moment, but except for a harassed frown he showed little signs of his disappointment as he again called Mary to the witness-stand.

She came more willingly this time; it seemed somehow less of an ordeal for she sensed that things had gone in her favor for a moment, and she did not even flinch when, with a flourish, the District Attorney took up the revolver (lying with the other exhibits of the case before the jury) and, thrusting it toward her, asked sharply:

"Have you ever seen this revolver before, Miss Page?"

"Yes, it belonged to Mr. Pollock."

"Was it in his possession on the night when he was murdered?"

"No." Her voice broke now and fell.

"It was in my possession then."

"And you had it at the Hotel Republic."

"Yes."

"And was it your habit," the prosecutor's voice was satirically mocking, "was it your habit, Miss Page, to attend banquets with a revolver in your handbag?"

Mary flushed angrily.

"The revolver was lying on my dressing-table at the theater," she said, "and I put it into my bag, intending to give it to Mr. Langdon, but—I forgot it."

"It was an unfortunate loss of memory for Mr. Pollock," said the attorney dryly, with a glance at the jury. Then he abruptly waived the witness away, as though it would be a waste of time to question her further. Langdon halted her.

"Will you explain to the court," he cried, "how that revolver came into your possession, Miss Page?"

Gaining courage at his tone, and the smile that accompanied his words, Mary turned toward the jury and in that beautiful modulated voice that had held so many audiences spell-bound, she told rapidly, but in detail, the story of Pollock's visit to her dressing-room on the afternoon of that fatal day. She faltered a little over the recital of his abrupt proposal and, woman-like, put in the world-old apology for his brutality by the simple statement:

"He was drunk, you know."

Then, vividly, her slender hands gesturing and her voice rising with poignant memories and pride of Langdon, she told of the latter's entry in response to her screams and of his battle with Pollock. Tensely silent, but with every nerve alert, the crowd listened as she described how Pollock had pulled the revolver out of his pocket only to drop it.

"He tried to pick it up again," she said, unconsciously visualizing for them the picture of the struggling men, "but I crawled close and snatched it up before he could reach it."

She paused, and when she would have taken up the thread of her story again, Langdon's hand stopped her.

"That is all, thank you, Miss Page," he said, and the District Attorney, surprised on his face, but with a new glint in his eyes, got quickly to his feet.

"I crave the court's permission to ask the witness one more question," he said, and as the judge waved assent he asked slowly, knowing the sensation his question would create:

"Miss Page, was there anyone else in the room at the time this struggle was going on?"

"Not—not exactly in the room," said Mary, after an instant's hesitation. "There were people outside the door, and—and my maid, who had been out, ran in during the excitement."

"Is your maid Janet or Jeannette Beauchamp?"

"Yes." Mary's voice was uneasy now.

and her eyes met the frightened ones of the maid, who had risen with the apparent intention of leaving the room. But before she had reached the door the prosecutor had waved Mary from the stand and the clerk called loudly: "Janet Beauchamp!"

There was a startled cry of "Oh, mon Dieu!" and the Frenchwoman paused, wringing her hands, the center of attention. She made a half movement as if determined to escape anyway and defy the law, but the sight of the police that guarded the exits and the stern repetition of her name brought her reluctantly back. She murmured a little prayer and crossed herself as she took the oath, but the cool friendliness of the prosecutor's voice reassured her.

"Janet, how long have you been in the employ of Miss Page?"

"Two—no, three years zis season."

"And was it usual for you to leave the dressing-room when your mistress was getting ready for the street?"

"No, monsieur—sir!"

"But you had been told to leave her on this particular day?"

"Told to leave!" Janet's voice rose in Gallic excitement. "Mais non! I had but gone to ze petite milliner, for ze new fowaires for ze blue gown."

"Who told you to go?"

"Monsieur Daniels, he come in, and he and mademoiselle, they talk, and he say pourquoi could I not go to ze ze new fowaires—ze orchids, since ze shops would not be close for one half hour yet. And Miss Page she say, certainment that I should go then, for she could finish to dress by herself for once."

"How long were you out?"

"Oh, je ne sais pas—I mean, I do not know. Maybe fifteen, maybe twenty minutes. I come back quick parceque there are two kinds of orchid at ze shop, and I want mademoiselle to see zem both."

"And isn't it true," shouted the District Attorney, suddenly leaning forward and fairly hurling his words at the witness, "isn't it true that when you came in you saw Miss Page threaten Mr. Pollock with this revolver?"

He caught up the weapon as he spoke and thrust it under her eyes. The maid, with a quivering little scream of horror, shrank back amid a murmur of sympathy from the crowd. She could not speak.

"Isn't it true?" persisted the prosecutor harshly. "Answer my question—or tell us just what you did see when you came into the theater upon your return from the errand?"

Bursting into a storm of tears, Janet flung out her arms in a wild gesture.

"It is true," she sobbed. "Mees Page, my mademoiselle, she was standing—and she had ze revolver—pointed at Mr. Pollock—and he—he—ran out of ze room."

At the words, Mary, whose hands had been twitching nervously throughout the maid's testimony, rose to her feet with a little gasping cry as if she would speak; but before the words came she swung suddenly about and crumpled into a little heap on the floor.

In an instant the whole room was on its feet, surging forward toward the dock, and the sobs of the maid were echoed by more than one woman among the spectators, where sympathy for the time ran high, though the pendulum swayed back when someone said shrilly with a derisive laugh:

"She's a good actress, is Mary Page?"

But the judge's gavel quelled the excitement and the dire threat back of



"Was there any one else in the room?"

his curt words that unless there was order in the court he would clear the room, was like oil upon the troubled waters of the sea of onlookers, and they sat in hushed silence as Mrs. Page and Langdon knelt beside the unconscious form of the slim young prisoner, bathing her temples and chafing her wrists until the momentary respite of nullity forsook her and she opened her eyes to the suffering of reality.

At the sight of the fear on both Langdon's and her mother's face, however, she struggled bravely to regain her self-control and when the clerk called the next witness she was again in her chair. Very white and wan, but erect, her pallid lips set firmly to hold back the threatening tides of emotion and weariness that were sweeping over her.

The drumming in her ears and the little waves of nausea that are the aftermath of a fainting fit made events blurred to her for a little time, and it

was with a start of surprise that she recognized in the new witness her erstwhile leading man.

The mere sight of his graceful figure and his boyish face; that handsome juvenile expression that was his stock in trade, brought a flood of memories surging over her, and the shocked pity in his eyes made her realize keenly the difference that lay between Mary Page the prisoner—and Mary Page the star.

His testimony was to a great extent a repetition of what had gone before. He had been at the banquet; had seen the boy bring the message to Miss Page and had bidden her good night when she left. A few minutes later the sound of the shot had taken him down the hall with the others and lay in the room where Pollock and Mary lay—the one dead—the other unconscious.

"It was I who first urged that some one call the police," he said in his well-trained, youthful voice. "I would have gone myself but I wanted to be sure first whether I could be of service to Miss Page."

"Was that the reason you refused to leave the room when ordered to do so



Langdon's Lips Grew Grave Again at the Next Question.

by Detective Farley?" The prosecutor's voice was dry.

"I resented his tone, sir," answered the young actor. "And besides," flushing, "I was her leading man and I felt that it—it was my place to be with her rather than that a lot of strangers should hang about."

An involuntary smile crossed Langdon's lips, but they grew grave again at the next question.

"After your election by Detective Farley and Mr. Langdon did you leave the hotel?"

"No, sir. I waited in the hallway in case I was wanted."

"Did you re-enter the room?"

"Yes, sir—not immediately, but when I heard a confusion of voices following the re-entry of the house detective and Mr. Langdon."

"Could you hear what was said?"

The actor flushed and hesitated, and then answered slowly:

"Yes, sir—in part."

"Will you please repeat what part you heard?"

"I heard Mr. Langdon say, 'But good God, there's only one door, she must be some place in here,' and the detective said, 'Well, she's not—you can see that.' Then Mr. Langdon said, 'There's the window—perhaps she's out there—I'll see.' And his voice sounded queer and excited as if he were frightened, and the detective said, 'No, nothing doing on that, sir—just remember, Mr. Langdon, that as yet I've no way of knowing whether that shot was fired before or after you entered this room!'"

"Did Mr. Langdon reply?"

"Yes," he said. "You d— fool, what do you mean? But just then the police came up and ran in, and I went on in with them, and the detective shouted, 'Some of you go down that fire-escape and hunt for a girl in an evening gown without either cloak or hat—and one of you keep your eye on this man Langdon—he was either in this room or at the door when James Pollock was murdered!'"

[Next installment, "My Time Will Come!"]

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